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ABSTRACT

A study described and evaluated "First Steps," an intervention program for low-reading first graders that was implemented in four rural schools in western North Carolina. First Steps borrows heavily from Reading Recovery but differs significantly in the areas of pre-post assessment, tutor training, and teaching procedures. Attention was given to the program's sequential implementation across the school year, information provided on the selection of tutors, initial screening of first graders, tutor training procedures, content of the tutoring lessons, and end-of-year- results. Results indicated that in four of the five classrooms, First Steps was successful in helping low-readiness first graders learn to read. (Contains 20 references, 7 tables, and 2 figures of data.) (RS)

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# FIRST STEPS: AN EARLY READING INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Describes an intervention program for low-reading first graders that was implemented in four rural schools in western North Carolina. Attention is given to the program's sequential implementation across the school year, with information provided on the selection of tutors, initial screening of first graders, tutor training procedures, content of the tutoring lessons, and end-of-year results.

# FIRST STEPS, AN EARLY READING INTERVENTION PROGRAM

Systematic, one-to-one tutoring of low-reading first graders is an idea whose time has come. We have evidence that children who fall significantly behind their peers in first grade reading will more than likely still be the lowest readers in their second, third, and even fourth grade classes (Clay, 1991; Juel, 1988). However, we also know, from the intervention work of Clay (1985) and Slavin, Madden and Karweit (1989), that early and intensive one-to-one tutoring can prevent many at-risk readers from falling behind their peer group in the first place.

Marie Clay (1979, 1985) deserves considerable credit for focusing the English-speaking world's attention on the effectiveness of early, tutorial-based intervention in reading. In the late 1970's, when American schools were concentrating on small-group remedial reading instruction beginning no earlier than second grade, Clay argued forcefully that effective "catch-up" instruction in reading would have to 1) <u>begin earlier</u>--in first grade when the child had not yet fallen too far behind; and 2) <u>be more intensive</u>--one-to-one as opposed to small-group. This logic led to the development of the highly successful <u>Reading</u>

Recovery program in New Zealand, a program that in the 1990's is being used with beginning readers in Australia, the United States, and Great Britain.

Slavin, Madden, and Karweit (1989), working in low-socioeconomic-level schools in urban Baltimore (Success for All), also concentrated on preventing reading failure in the primary grades. Interestingly, this research group reached conclusions similar to Clay's regarding the importance of intervening early in first grade and providing one-to-one reading instruction to the neediest children. In a thoughtful position paper, Wasik and Slavin (1990) outlined the merits of tutorial instruction, arguing, among other things, that a one-to-one setting can insure that the beginning reader is 1) taught consistently at the appropriate level, and 2) provided with timely reinforcement and corrective feedback in the act of reading. Wasik and Slavin rightly point out that such individually paced instruction is not possible in "even one-to-two or one-to-three instruction, where adaptation to individual needs becomes progressively more difficult (p. 6)."

Although Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985; Pinnell, 1990) and Success for All (Slavin et al., 1989) share an emphasis on first grade intervention and tutorial instruction, the two programs are very different in both design and content. In Reading Recovery, there is no requirement that the "pull-out" tutorial instruction be coordinated closely with the child's on-going classroom reading instruction; in Success

for All, such coordination is a prime, built-in feature of the program. In Reading Recovery, the child reads "natural language" stories and receives incidental letter-sound instruction in the context of meaningful reading and writing; in Success for All, the child reads highly controlled word-pattern texts and receives systematic instruction in basic phonics patterns. Finally, Reading Recovery is a first grade program, while Success for All continues to provide tutorial assistance to those who need it through the third grade.

In spite of these sizeable differences, both Reading Recovery and Success for All have demonstrated success in teaching at-risk children to read in first grade. This raises an obvious question. Are there other tutorial models, with still different assumptions and procedures, that could produce positive results with at-risk first grade readers? Or, could the existing Reading Recovery or Success for All models be modified and still achieve positive results? This is an important issue. In the case of Reading Recovery, many school districts across the country do not have geographic access to a certified Reading Recovery trainer, and others have decided that they cannot afford the cost of the training. In addition, the overwhelmingly positive (and not undeserved) publicity received by Reading Recovery may be discouraging school districts from trying other one-to-one interventions if they cannot get the trademarked version. (I would argue that the

same publicity has also discouraged many reading educators from developing alternative models.) Such attention to and reliance on one model seems short-sighted, however, because it can restrict the applied experimentation that might very well improve on the original concept (program), or at least demonstrate its applicability in a wider set of circumstances.

The present article will describe First Steps, a first grade reading intervention program that borrows heavily from Reading Recovery, but differs significantly in the areas of pre-post assessment, tutor training, and teaching procedures. First Steps was introduced in four rural schools in western North Carolina during the 1991-1992 school year. The following account of the program's sequential implementation across the school year will include information about the selection of tutors, initial screening of first graders, tutor training procedures, content of the tutoring lessons across time, and end-of-year results.

## The First Steps Program

### Selection of tutors

First Steps was initiated when a public school curriculum coordinator approached the author, a college reading clinic director, about providing early reading intervention training to her county's Chapter 1 teachers. The administrator was committed to using--i.e., transferring--some of the county's Chapter 1 funds to mount

a more prevention-oriented reading effort in the primary grades. Eventually, four of the county's eight elementary schools were targeted. In these four schools--the ones with the lowest reading achievement scores--there were five Chapter 1 teachers and five first grade teachers (One school had two small first grade classes). It was decided that each Chapter 1 teacher would tutor three to four first grade students individually as part of his/her daily workload. Each first grade teacher would tutor one low reader from her own class for 30 minutes each day (While the teacher was tutoring, her assistant would read to the class or monitor seatwork assignments). The main responsibilities of the clinic director, hereafter referred to as the trainer, were to conduct a series of inservices for participating teachers throughout the year, and to make regular visits to observe tutoring lessons in each school.

Initial screening of first grade students

In mid-September, the trainer met with the five Chapter 1 and five first grade teachers to discuss a strategy for identifying at-risk or low-readiness first grade readers. In this first inservice, the trainer described the Early Reading Screening Instrument (ERSI) (Morris, 1992a), and the teachers watched a short videotape of the test being administered to a first grade child. The ERSI, which takes only 15-20 minutes to administer, consists of four parts:

- alphabet knowledge: The child attempts to identify the upper and lower case alphabet letters as they are presented in random order; the child attempts to write the alphabet letters as they are dictated in random order (Range = 0 to 78).
- concept of word in text: The child attempts to match spoken words to written words in the act of echo-reading two short texts (eight sentences). (Range = 0 to 16).
- phoneme awareness: The child attempts to produce "sound-it-out" written spellings of 12 words dictated by the examiner. The 12 words contain 42 phonemes. (Range = 0 to 42).
- word recognition: The child attempts to read a list of ten basal preprimer words and ten decodable (CVC) words. (Range = 0 to 20).

The very next day, screening was initiated in the schools. Taking one school per day, the trainer would begin by testing a child while the first grade teacher and Chapter 1 teacher in the school observed. Then, each of them tested a student while the trainer observed, offering feedback if necessary. Once the teachers were comfortable with and consistent in administering the screening battery, they, along with the trainer, proceeded to test all the first graders in the school. (In this pilot year of the program, we wanted to see how the lowest readers compared to the rest of the class on the ERSI tasks.) In just four days, one day

at each school, the screening was completed.

At this point, the trainer constructed class profiles of the children's performance on the ERSI (see Table 1), and also asked each first grade teacher, without access to the screening results, to identify and then rank the lowest eight readers in her class--from "most in need of help" (1) to "least in need of help" (8). Using the ERSI data and the teacher rankings, we (the teachers, the trainer, and the Chapter 1 supervisor) determined, class by class, which children would be the first to recieve the one-to-one tutoring. Notice in Table 1 that Annie (A.B.) and Charlotte (C.M.), two of the three lowest ERSI scorers in the class, were chosen for the two available tutoring slots. The decision not to take Connie (C.C.) was based on the classroom teacher's judgment that the other two children were more in need of the extra reading help.

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Insert Table 1

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Tutor training

With the initial screening completed, the teachers attended a one-hour inservice where they were introduced to the instructional routine or lesson plan that would be used each day in the tutoring program. This was accomplished through lecture and viewing a short videotape. The lesson plan, modeled after that of Reading Recovery (Clay, 1979, 1985), included 4 parts that were to be completed in 30

minutes:

- Rereading (12 min.): The child rereads two or three short natural language texts with the tutor offering support when needed.
- Word Study (5 min.): The child, depending on his/her level of knowledge, works on the alphabet, beginning consonants, word families, or vowel patterns. Game-like categorization activities are the vehicle for this instruction.
- Writing (8 min.): The child writes a sentence of his or her own choice, relying on the tutor for support in remembering the sentence sequence, "hearing sounds" within individual words, or forming unfamiliar or forgotten alphabet letters.
- Reading a new book (5 min.): The child attempts to read a new book after previewing the pictures and possible story line with the tutor (Note: This new book will always be reread the very next tutoring lesson--see Rereading above.)

The day following the inservice, the trainer and lead Chapter 1 teacher each visited a different school. There, each taught a First Steps lesson while the particpating teachers (2 to 3) observed. Then the teachers taught a lesson and the trainer observed. A final debriefing not only provided the teachers with feedback on technique but also helped them to plan the next day's lesson. On the

following day, each trainer visited another school, providing the same type of modeling and feedback to the participating teachers. Thus, with the inservice and on-site visits, daily First Steps tutoring was underway in four schools within a two-day period.

The training model of inservice meetings at the university and follow-up observations of tutoring lessons in the schools was continued throughout the school year. There were 15 Thursday night inservice sessions during the year, most of these occurring before the Christmas break (see Figure 1). These inservices allowed the trainer to impart new information and to comment on ongoing tutoring issues (e.g., necessary refinements of tutoring technique) in the presence of all ten First Steps teachers.

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Insert Figure 1

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The trainers' observations of tutoring lessons in the schools were critical to the success of First Steps. Ninety (90) minute school visits were scheduled so that the trainer could observe each teacher tutoring one or more students. Figure 1 shows that over one-half of the 23 observations occurred before the Christmas break, indicating the need for close tutor-trainer interaction during the early months of the program.

The observations allowed the trainer to provide individual feedback to the tutors regarding technique ("Let

the child read past word recognition errors sometimes to see if he can self-correct") and pacing ("Josh is really doing well; why don't we move him up to Level 4 and see how he does?"). On occasion, the trainer moved in and modeled a given teaching strategy for the tutor. The tutors appreciated this model teaching and, at the same time, it afforded the trainer a better understanding of an individual child's reading ability. The in-school observations served a final function. In keeping the trainer abreast of developmental changes in the children's reading behavior and the tutors' teaching behavior, the observations allowed the trainer to plan timely inservices back at the university, inservices that would provide the tutors with needed feedback on their performance while helping them to anticipate the next step in their students' reading development.

The lesson plan: Changes and refinements across time

The First Steps lesson plan, like that of Reading Recovery, is simply an organizational structure for 30 minutes of instruction. The specific activities within the plan (rereading, word study, sentence writing, new reading) change in complexity and kind as the child progresses in learning to read. The changing nature of First Steps instruction is described below for a child who began in September and was able to exit the program as a Primer-level reader in late-January.

September/October

Reading: Katie (6 years, 3 months) entered first grade knowing 16 lower-case alphabet letters and 0 words in a sample drawn from the Preprimer level of her classroom basal reader. In the initial First Steps lessons, Katie finger-point read simple, natural language texts from the Storybox and Sunshine series (Wright Group, 1991). These stories contain predictable sentence patterns with only one to two lines of text per page. Still, Katie needed considerable tutor support (modeling, echo-reading, word recognition help) in reading these simple texts.

At this stage, the reading goals for the child were 1) to learn to match spoken words to printed words when reading text; 2) to use sentence context, illustrations, and the beginning consonant letter as convergent word recognition cues; and 3) to develop a small store of quickly recognized words (sight vocabulary).

Word Study: In the early word study lessons, Katie learned to sort picture cards into columns by beginning consonant sound (see Figure 2).

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See Figure 2

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Next she learned the sound/letter pairings (/b/ - b; /m/ - m; /s/ - s). Because the ultimate goal of such instruction was for the child to use this beginning consonant knowledge in context, the tutor frequently called Katie's attention to

the beginning consonant in words as she read stories and attempted to write sentences. (Note: If a child lacks basic alphabet letter knowledge, this is taught along with beginning consonant discrimination).

Writing: Each day Katie attempted to write a single sentence with the tutor's support. In September, she was able to represent only a few beginning consonants in her sentences.

M D is* A B hound* D.
(My dog is a big hound dog.)

In the example above, the tutor had to probe for the inital sound in each word; however, Katie was successful on five of the seven words. When she hesitated on 'is' (a high frequency word), the tutor wrote the word and let Katie copy it into her sentence. When Katie was unable to "hear" the beginning consonant in 'hound' (a low frequency word), the tutor simply wrote this word into the sentence.

Next, the tutor copied the sentence (correctly spelled this time) onto a sentence strip and had Katie finger-point read it. The sentence strip was then cut into word units, and the word units scrambled. Katie's final task was to reassemble the sentence and finger-point read it.

hound . big dog
My dog is a ←

Note that each of the sub-tasks in this September writing lesson focused the child's attention on word units within the sentence and beginning consonant letter/sounds within the word units.

November/December

Reading: After 6 weeks of tutoring, Katie had progressed to reading Level 6 stories in the natural language texts (The gradient of difficulty ranges from Levels 1 to 10). At Level 6 there are more words on a page (longer sentences) and more pages per story. Despite the increased difficulty of the stories, Katie actually received less tutor support as she read. Her small but growing sight vocabulary and emerging decoding skill combined to make her a more independent reader. In fact, at certain points, the tutor purposefully withheld word recognition assistance, forcing Katie to "struggle-read" or problem-solve an unknown word by coordinating sentence context, picture, and letter/sound cues.

Word Study: Having mastered beginning consonant letter/sound correspondences, Katie at this stage worked on word families or rhyming words. By sorting one-syllable short vowel words into "families," she not only strengthened her beginning consonant awareness but also learned to attend to other letter-sound properties of the word, specifically the ending consonant and the medial vowel.

| hat | man | cap |
|---|---|---|
| mat | pan | nap |
| sat | can | lap |
| flat | ran | |

clap

Short i, short o, and short e words were sorted in turn, but a new sort was not introduced until the preceding one had been mastered. Mastery meant that Katie could recognize most of the short vowel words in isolation, and also spell them (see Morris, 1992b, for a fuller explanation of word family sorts).

Writing: Katie's sentence writing ability had progressed considerably over six weeks' time (27 lessons). She now knew a few high frequency spellings (the, is, my, like, etc.) and consistently represented the beginning and ending consonants in words. Therefore, in the daily writing lessons, the tutor began to probe for vowel discrimination in one or two words per sentence.

MY DADE JRV ME TO SKL IN THE FG.

(My daddy drove me to school in the fog.)

In the preceding sentence, Katie, with the tutor's guidance, was eventually able to perceive the /o/ sound in 'drove,' but not the /a/ sound in 'fog.' In the case of 'drove,' she changed her original invented spelling to JROV. Note that in the tutor's "probes," he/she was not trying to teach Katie the correct spellings of individual words, but rather

was trying to build the child's conceptual knowledge of words, knowledge (e.g., medial vowel awareness) that would transfer to a large number of future spellings.

The cut-up sentence activity (see September/October) was still being used in late-November, but this task now presented little challenge to Katie and would soon be omitted in the daily sentence-writing lessons.

January (Transition)

Reading: When Katie, in early January, reached Level 10 in the natural language Storybox texts, the tutor began to include less-predictable or less-patterned texts in the reading lessons. Tradebook favorites by such authors as Hoff, Lobel, and Mayer offered her two weeks of enjoyable reading practice. In the last two weeks of January, the Primer-level book from Katie's classroom basal reader was introduced in the tutoring lessons. Although in the classroom Katie's low reading group was just finishing the Preprimer 2 book, she showed that, with tutor support, she could handle the Primer-level stories.

With the introduction of the basal stories, the structure of the daily lesson plan changed. First, Katie read aloud a basal story, with the tutor stopping her every page or two to check on comprehension (15 min.). If reading fluency and comprehension were adequate, then a new basal story was introduced the next day. If Katie's reading was labored or halting, then the same story might be reread during the first part of the next day's lesson. Second,

Katie sorted one-syllable words by vowel pattern (5 min.). She practiced both reading and spelling these short, long, and r-controlled patterns (see Word Study, below). Third, Katie read or reread favorite tradebooks with the emphasis on building fluency (10 min.). This three-step lesson plan (note the omission of sentence writing) was used during Katie's last 13 tutoring lessons. The goal was to accelerate her reading progress so that she could return to the classroom as a strong Primer-level reader.

Word Study: The extensive work with short vowel word families (see November/December) provided Katie with a good foundation for further vowel pattern study. In January, she first studied the short vowel patterns, working toward automatic word recognition and accurate spelling.

| can | pig | top |
|---|---|---|
| hat | sit | hot |
| lap | win | job |
| bag | sick | |
| slap | | |

drop

Once Katie was facile with the five short vowel patterns, short vs. long vs. r-controlled contrasts were introduced in the vowel pattern study.

| hat | make | car |
|---|---|---|
| sad | name | park |
| can | page | farm |
| rag | tape | hard |
| clap | place | start |

With Primer-level reading ability, Katie had the requisite

sight vocabulary to benefit from such vowel pattern sorting. The goal, of course, was not to teach her individual words or even phonics rules, but rather to strengthen her tacit, developing grasp of the English spelling system (see Invernizzi, Abouzeid, & Gill, 1994; Morris, 1992b; Schlagal & Schlagal, 1992).

Writing: Katie wrote quickly and confidently the following sentence on January 10:

I HOPE IT SNOES HARD BECOS I GOT A NOO SLAD.
(I hope it snows hard because I got a new sled.)

After silently marveling at Katie's development (see September and November writing samples), the tutor quickly focused on two misspellings in the sentence. She pointed out that the long /o/ sound in 'snow' is spelled with the ow pattern, and then wrote two other words that are spelled similarly, low and grow. Next, the tutor asked Katie to correct the spelling, SLAD, noting that "this is a pattern we have worked on." Katie quickly made the correction. Other misspellings could have been attended to (and correct spellings praised), but it was time to move on.

Two days later, the sentence writing task was dropped from the daily lesson plan. It had fulfilled its major functions: that is, to heighten Katie's awareness of phonemes within spoken words; to introduce her to the spellings of many high frequency words; and to allow her to apply, during the act of writing, the spelling pattern

knowledge that she was acquiring through the word sort activities.

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Katie left the First Steps program on the last day of January after 70 tutoring lessons. At this point, she could read Primer-level text with adequate word recognition, fluency, and comprehension. Her classroom teacher, after observing Katie read a Primer story with the tutor, agreed to move Katie from the low to middle reading group in the classroom (The middle group was one-third of the way through the Primer book at this time). Katie made the transition easily and, given the faster pacing of the middle group's instruction, she was, by year's end, reading comfortably in the latter half of the 1-2 reader.

Not all First Steps students learned to read as quickly as Katie (see Results). However, even for those students who remained in the program a full year, the sequence of reading development (and instruction) was essentially the same. Thus, while Katie was able to move into the Primer-level basal text in January, another child might have made the transition in March, a full two months later.

## Results

Of the 108 children in the 5 first grade classrooms, 30 received First Steps tutoring during the school year. In terms of number of tutoring lessons received, the First Steps students comprised three groups (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2

Group 1 (N = 11), the "half-year" participants, received an average of 61 tutoring lessons. Six of these 11 students began in early-October, attained Primer-level reading ability by mid-February, and exited the program (see Katie in previous section). When these six left, five of their classmates entered the program and were tutored through the month of May. Group 2 (N =10), the "full-year" participants, received an average of 121 tutoring lessons. These students were tutored from October through May; they did not exit the program in February because at that point they had not attained sufficient reading skill. Lastly, Group 3 (N = 9) received an average of 92 tutoring lessons. These students entered the program in mid-November (after a second Chapter 1 teacher was added in two of the schools) and were tutored until the end of the school year.

In September, Primer-level reading ability had been declared a reasonable year-end goal for children receiving First Steps tutoring; in fact, this goal was written into the school district's Chapter 1 proposal. In early June, an achievement battery was administered to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. The battery, administered individually to all 108 first graders, included:

- Basal word recognition: Each child attempted to read 40 isolated words (Preprimer through 2-2 difficulty) randomly selected from the classroom basal reader. (Range = 0 to 40).
- Basal passage reading: The child attempted to read aloud selected passages from the classroom basal reader (Houghton Mifflin, 1986). Consecutive passages (PP1, PP2, PP3, Primer, 1-2, 2-1) were read until the child was clearly frustrated. Word Recognition accuracy criteria were: Preprimer (85%); Primer and 1-2 (90%); and 2-1 (92%).
- Spelling: The child attempted to write 15 words dictated one at a time by the examiner: back, feet, step, junk, picking, mail, side, chin, dress, peeked, lamp, road, plant, short, and grabbed. Each spelling was scored qualitatively (0 to 5 points) according to principles of developmental spelling theory (see Morris & Perney, 1984). (Range = 0 to 75).
- Decoding: The child attempted to read 12 short vowel words: cap, net, win, bug, fat, mop, dig, job, flag, drop, swim, and club. (Range = 0 to 12).

Table 3 shows how the 30 First Steps children fared on the most important achievement variable, Basal passage reading.

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Insert Table 3

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In June, 76% of the First Steps children were able to read a Primer-level passage from the classroom basal reader with 90% accuracy. As expected, performance on the isolated word recognition tasks (Basal and Decodable) correlated highly with passage reading level. On the Spelling task, 80% of the First Steps children (24 of 30) were able to achieve 40 or more points, indicating Phonetic stage (or better) spelling ability. That is, these children were able to represent reliably both the consonant and vowel phonemes in their spellings of one-syllable words.

Table 4 provides a profile of reading achievement in one of the five classrooms.

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Insert Table 4

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By year's end, two of the three First Steps students (C.M. and B.P.) in Classroom A were strong reader/spellers and the third (A.B.) had made considerable progress. In effect, reading failure in this first grade class had been eliminated.

Not every classroom fared as well as did Classroom A. Table 5 shows First Steps basal passage reading and spelling performance for each of the five classrooms.

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Insert Table 5

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The pattern of results in Classrooms B and C was similar to that in Classrooms A (see Table 4); that is, there were three to four First Steps children in each class and, with one exception, all learned to read at the Primer level or better. First Steps was less successful with low readers in Classroom E; here, only four of the nine tutored students were able to read at the Primer level in June. It is true that there was a large low-readiness group (n = 9) in Classroom E, making it a difficult class to teach (Barr, 1982). Nonetheless, Classroom D had a similarly large number of low-readiness students, and these children (9 of 10) seemed to benefit significantly from the First Steps tutoring.

The unusual stability of this rural educational setting afforded one more analysis, though post hoc in nature. It turned out that the five first grade teachers in this study had been teaching first grade at their respective schools in each of the two preceding years. The Chapter 1 teachers had also remained in place. Moreover, in June of the preceding years (1990 and 1991), the Chapter 1 teacher in each school had screened the lowest first grade readers (as referred by their teacher) with a reading battery used county-wide.

We decided to take advantage of this circumstance by testing the 30 First Steps children with the county's Chapter 1 reading battery and then comparing their performance (June, 1992) with the performance of low-reading first graders from the previous two years (June, 1991 and

June, 1990). [Remember that there was no intervention program for low reading first graders during the 1989-1990 or 1990-1991 school years.]

The county assessment battery was a simple one:

- Word recognition: Each child attempted to read isolated words presented in a flash/untimed format. The words appeared on graded lists (Preprimer, Primer, and 1-2, 20 words per list) derived from Basic Reading Vocabularies (Harris & Jacobson, 1982).

- Passage reading: Each child attempted to read aloud the Primer and 1-2 passages from the Analytic Reading Inventory (Woods & Moe, 1981).

Based on the assessment above, Table 6 provides a school-by-school comparison of the performance of the 30 First Steps students (1992) with the performance of the low-reading first graders from the previous two years (1990 and 1991, combined).

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Insert Table 6

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In three of the four schools, the First Steps children outperformed the non-tutored children. The low-scoring First Steps school in 1992 (River Park) housed Classroom E. An important overall finding in Table 3 is the First Steps group's superiority in Primer-level word knowledge. At the end of first grade, 50% of the tutored children could read

three-fourths of the Primer words while only 7% of the non-tutored children could do so. This gain in word knowledge would undoubtedly benefit the First Steps children (and their teachers) when they entered second grade in the fall.

## Discussion

In four of the five classes (three of the four schools), First Steps was successful in helping low-readiness first graders learn to read. In fact, of the 21 children tutored in these 4 classes (A, B, C, and D), 8 children in June could read at the 1-2 level and 11 more at the Primer level. First Steps was less successful in Classroom E, with only four of the nine tutored children being able to read at the Primer level in June.

There are several possible reasons for the lower achievement in Classroom E. However, to make a conceptual point, I would like to consider only one--the slow pacing of basal reader instruction in Classroom E. Instructional pacing research has shown that content coverage (e.g., number of graded levels children move through in a basal reader program) is a significant determiner of first grade reading achievement (Barr, 1974). In the present study, Classrooms D and E had similar reading readiness profiles in September: D's 24 students had an ERSI mean of 18.6 with with 9 children scoring below 15.0; E's 24 students had an ERSI mean of 19.0 with 10 children scoring below 15.0). However, at years' end, First Steps students in Classroom D (n = 9) were much stronger readers than their counterparts

in Classroom E (n = 10) (see Table 5).

Table 7 presents "instructional pacing" data for Classrooms D and E. The data show where children were reading in their basal reader program in December, and again in May.

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Insert Table 7

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Given similar readiness profiles and competent First Steps tutoring in both classes, one can surmise that the slower instructional pacing in Classroom E (over half the class was still in the Preprimer 1 book in December) led to lower reading achievement. There are alternative explanations, but such an analysis points to a crucial fact infrequently mentioned in the Reading Recovery literature. That is, what goes on in the classroom counts as much as what goes on in the tutoring lessons. The optimal situation for a low-reading child is appropriately-paced instruction in both classroom and tutorial, producing a spiraling effect on achievement. At the same time, it is quite possible that too-slow pacing of reading instruction in the first grade classroom can limit the ultimate effectiveness of any supplementary tutoring program.

On the positive side, effective supplemental tutoring should allow the first grade teacher to <u>increase</u> the pace at which he/she moves the low reading group through a basal or other reading curriculum. First Steps children, at the

beginning of the year, are at the bottom of the low classroom reading group. However, as they improve (due to 150 extra minutes per week of one-to-one instruction), the "bottom" of the low group rises in reading ability, thereby making it easier for the classroom teacher to accelerate the low group's pacing. Note that such accelerated pacing should benefit not only the First Steps children but also other members of the low reading group.

The participation of both Chapter 1 and first grade teachers in the First Steps training was a major strength of the intervention. Because both groups were tutoring children daily and attending the same inservice sessions throughout the year, we were able to avoid the in-class vs. pull-out "turf" controversy that is associated with many remediation efforts. In this project, the first grade teachers understood and respected what was being done with their low readers when they left the classroom to visit the Chapter 1 teacher. Moreover, the shared tutoring experience served to enhance communication between first grade and Chapter 1 teachers regarding the progress and needs of individual students.

Another advantage of involving first grade teachers in the intervention was that these teachers gained invaluable experience in working one-to-one with low ability readers. What one can observe about the beginning reading process in a tutoring context is qualitatively different from what one can observe in a reading group context, where turn-taking,

on-task behavior, and other management concerns are present. If we are to develop "expert" teachers of at-risk beginning readers, there will likely be no substitute for intensive clinical training; that is, one-to-one teaching experiences with the opportunity for feedback and dialogue on the teaching act (see Clay, 1985; also Schon, 1987). Some might argue that the First Steps teacher training was situation-specific--that is, helpful only in the tutorial context. However, there was good reason for us to believe otherwise. Much of the information imparted in the First Steps group inservices was directly related to classroom instruction: e.g., supported oral reading strategies, developmental spelling theory, word sort as a method for teaching phonics, etc. The teachers not only heard about these methods, but also learned to apply them in the supervised tutoring context. It was then up to the individual teacher to decide how much he/she would or could adapt the tutorial methods to the classroom context. In several first grade classrooms, teacher-directed word sorting in small groups began to take the place of phonics worksheets. In other classrooms, the amount of student writing increased with the teachers' more sophisticated understanding of (and enthusiam for) invented spelling theory. Finally, the Chapter 1 teachers were able to adapt large segments of the First Steps lesson for their small group work with remedial second and third graders.

An indirect but important influence of the First Steps intervention was the attention it focused on the larger

system in which the children were learning to read. For example, when the ERSI or reading readiness scores were analysed in September, it became apparent that two of the four schools had a greater number of low-readiness first graders. This brought up the question of resource distribution: Should these two schools have more First Steps tutors? It also stimulated administrative thought and action regarding the type of county-wide kindergarten instruction that would best prepare children for success in first grade reading. Assessment data at year's end showed clearly that not all First Steps students had caught up with their peers in reading. The school system came to realize that a one-year intervention, no matter how well-conceptualized and energetically carried out, would not "save" every at-risk reader. To this end, however, the county made plans to initiate the following school year an in-school volunteer tutoring program for low-reading second graders (Parent and college student volunteers would tutor under the supervision of the school Chapter 1 teacher). These are just a few examples of how the First Steps intervention in grade one led educators to consider a broader context (kindergarten through second grade) for eliminating reading failure.

First grade reading intervention of the kind described in this article is a promising development in a field (beginning reading instruction) that for a century has been characterized by philosophical dogma, trend swings, and

faddish quick-fix solutions. In considering at-risk beginning readers, it is hard to fault the logic of intervening early, in a one-to-one context, with a well-trained teacher who uses balanced instruction. Furthermore, in our schools, the time has come to invest in teacher knowledge and skill; those who work with struggling beginning readers need teaching expertise, not the newest basal reader or newest computer software.

The present First Steps model borrows heavily from Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985), particularly with regard to the daily instructional routine. However, it is unlikely that one specific instructional format or one teacher training model is critical to an intervention's success. In fact, there should be continuing experimentation or "tinkering" with existing intervention models (e.g., Reading Recovery, Success for All) to see if they can be improved or made more flexible. Achievement data and cost-effectiveness will eventually settle the issue. But how short-sighted it would be to think that "the" answer has already been found in a field of study so promising and so new.

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Materials:

Houghton Mifflin Reading Program (1986)

The Wright Group Storybox series (1991)

The Wright Group Sunshine series (1991)

Figure 1. Group inservices and frequency of in-school observations across the school year

| | Group Inservices at the University | In-school Observations |
|---|---|---|
| September/ October | 1) Program Orientation | (7) |
| | 2) Screening the children (ERSI) | |
| | 3) Description of the lesson plan | |
| | 4) Development of word awareness and phoneme awareness in the beginning reader | |
| | 5) Developmental spelling theory and its role in the "sentence writing" task | |
| | 6) Early word study (beginning consonant and word family instruction) | |
| November/ December | 7) Monitoring oral reading behavior (knowing when and how to intervene) | (5) |
| | 8) Strategies for helping low-reading first graders in the classroom | |
| | 9) Instructional pacing theory (Barr, 1974) | |
| January | 10) Transition strategies (support reading in the basal reader and vowel pattern word study) | (3) |
| | 11) Making reasoned judgements about which children should leave and which should continue in the First Steps program | |
| February/ March | 12) Using the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DR-TA) to build comprehension | (4) |
| | 13) OPEN (depending on program needs) | |
| April/ May | 14) OPEN (depending on program needs) | (4) |
| | 15) Posttesting First Steps children | |

Figure 2. A beginning consonant sort

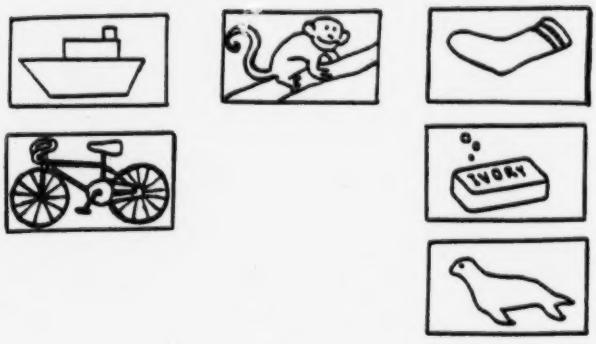

Table 1. Student performance on the Early Reading Screening Instrument (ERSI) in Classroom A

| Student | Alphabet | | | | Concept of Word | | | Phoneme Awareness | | Word Rec. | | | Grand Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Up 26 | Low 26 | Prod 26 | TOT | Pt 8 | Wd 8 | TOT | Count 42 | TOT | Bas 10 | Dec 10 | TOT | |
| K.H. | 25 | 23 | 26 | 9.5 | 8 | 8 | 10.0 | 37 | 8.8 | 3 | 10 | 6.5 | (34.8) |
| L.M. | 26 | 26 | 26 | 10.0 | 8 | 8 | 10.0 | 35 | 8.3 | 4 | 8 | 6.0 | (34.3) |
| M.D. | 26 | 25 | 26 | 9.9 | 8 | 8 | 10.0 | 32 | 7.6 | 9 | 4 | 6.5 | (34.0) |
| M.M | 25 | 22 | 25 | 9.2 | 7 | 8 | 9.4 | 36 | 8.5 | 2 | 8 | 5.0 | (32.1) |
| E.W. | 26 | 25 | 26 | 9.8 | 5 | 6 | 6.9 | 34 | 8.1 | 2 | 6 | 4.0 | (28.8) |
| B.L. | 26 | 24 | 26 | 9.7 | 7 | 6 | 8.1 | 30 | 7.1 | 2 | 5 | 3.5 | (28.4) |
| A.H. | 26 | 24 | 26 | 9.7 | 7 | 5 | 7.5 | 32 | 6.7 | 0 | 5 | 2.5 | (26.4) |
| J.J | 25 | 24 | 24 | 9.4 | 7 | 6 | 8.1 | 26 | 6.2 | 2 | 1 | 1.5 | (25.2) |
| S.S | 26 | 22 | 25 | 9.4 | 5 | 4 | 5.6 | 33 | 7.9 | 0 | 3 | 1.5 | (24.4) |
| L.P. | 24 | 24 | 24 | 9.2 | 7 | 3 | 6.2 | 22 | 5.2 | 0 | 1 | 0.5 | (21.1) |
| Z.W. | 24 | 21 | 24 | 8.5 | 3 | 4 | 4.4 | 31 | 7.4 | 0 | 1 | 0.5 | (20.8) |
| B.C. | 26 | 24 | 26 | 9.7 | 4 | 3 | 4.4 | 26 | 6.2 | 0 | 1 | 0.5 | (20.8) |
| C.B. | 26 | 22 | 24 | 9.2 | 4 | 5 | 5.6 | 19 | 4.5 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | (19.3) |
| M.C. | 23 | 21 | 19 | 8.1 | 5 | 6 | 6.9 | 9 | 2.1 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | (17.1) |
| H.P | 26 | 24 | 25 | 9.8 | 3 | 2 | 3.1 | 15 | 3.6 | 1 | 0 | 0.5 | (17.0) |
| * C.M. | 25 | 21 | 20 | 8.5 | 2 | 3 | 3.1 | 8 | 1.9 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | (13.5) |
| C.C. | 22 | 20 | 23 | 8.3 | 1 | 0 | 0.6 | 17 | 4.0 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | (12.9) |
| * A.B. | 20 | 19 | 20 | 7.6 | 4 | 1 | 3.1 | 6 | 1.4 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | (12.1) |

* Students selected for First Steps tutoring.
** Total score for a given task area (e.g., Alphabet) equals number of correct responses (74) divided by number of items (78). The Grand Total is the sum of the four task area Total scores.

Table 2. Three groups of First Steps students defined by number of tutoring lessons received

| | Number of First Steps lessons |
|---|---|
| Group 1 (n=11) | Mean = 60.7 (Range = 40 to 82) |
| Group 2 (n=10) | Mean = 91.5 (Range = 83 to 109) |
| Group 3 (n= 9) | Mean = 121.1 (Range = 110 to 135) |

Table 3. First Steps students' (n=30) performance on the basal passage reading task

| Basal Level | Number of Students | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 2-1 | 1 | 3% |
| 1-2 | 8 | 26% |
| Primer * | 14 | 47% |
| Preprimer 3 | 3 | 10% |
| Preprimer 2 | 1 | 3% |
| Preprimer 1 | 3 | 10% |

* Twenty-three (23) or 76% of the First Steps students could read the Primer-level passage or better.

Table 4. Student performance on the posttests in Classroom A

| Student | ERSI score | No. of lessons | Basal Passage Instructional Level | Basal Word Recog. (40) | Spelling (75) | Decoding (12) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K.H. | 34.8 | 0 | 2-1 | 40 | 70 | 12 |
| L.M. | 34.3 | 0 | 2-1 | 39 | 74 | 12 |
| M.G. | 34.0 | 0 | 2-1 | 40 | 70 | 12 |
| M.M. | 32.1 | 0 | 2-1 | 36 | 67 | 12 |
| E.W. | 28.8 | 0 | Primer | 35 | 67 | 12 |
| B.L. | 28.4 | 0 | 2-1 | 40 | 73 | 11 |
| A.H. | 26.4 | 0 | 2-1 | 34 | 67 | 11 |
| J.J. | 25.2 | 0 | 1-2 | 33 | 65 | 9 |
| S.S. | 24.4 | 0 | Primer | 32 | 67 | 10 |
| L.P. | 21.1 | 0 | Primer | 30 | 56 | 10 |
| Z.W. | 20.8 | 0 | PP3 | 32 | 53 | 8 |
| B.C. | 20.8 | 0 | 2-1 | 37 | 54 | 12 |
| C.B. | 19.3 | __** | Primer | 30 | 51 | 10 |
| M.C. | 17.1 | 0 | 1-2 | 30 | 62 | 6 |
| C.P. | 17.0 | 0 | Primer | 35 | 64 | 12 |
| * C.M. | 13.5 | 58 | 1-2 | 36 | 63 | 10 |
| C.C. | 12.9 | 0 | 1-2 | 31 | 45 | 10 |
| * A.B. | 12.1 | 124 | Primer | 12 | 47 | 8 |
| * B.P. | __ | 48 | 2-1 | 37 | 61 | 12 |

* First Steps students receiving 40 or more lessons. B.P., a mid-year transfer, was the lowest reader in the class upon entering the First Steps program in February.

** C.B. received only 32 tutoring lessons before school ended in June

Table 5. Number of First Steps children at each basal reader level and spelling level in each of the five classrooms (A, B, C, D, and E)

| Classroom | Readiness Score | Basal Reader Level | | | | | Spelling |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | PP2 | PP3 | Prim. | 1-2 | 2-1 | 40+ pts. |
| A (n=3) | (12.8) | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| B (n=4) | (13.6) | | | 3 | 1 | | 4 |
| C (n=4) | (17.1) | | 1 | 1 | 2 | | 3 |
| D (n=10) | (12.8) | | 1 | 5 | 4 | | 9 |
| E (n=9) | (12.3) | 4* | 1 | 4 | | | 5 |

* Note: Three of these four students could not read even the Preprimer 2 passage.

Table 6. Percentage of low reading students (1992 vs. 1990-1991) able to read graded word lists (Preprimer and Primer) with 75% accuracy and a Primer-level passage with 90% accuracy.

| School | Word Rec./untimed | | Oral Reading |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Preprimer | Primer | Primer |
| Jonestown | | | |
| 90-91 (n=13) | 31% | 15% | 23% |
| 92 (n= 4) | 75% | 50% | 50% |
| Valley | | | |
| 90-91 (n=15) | 40% | 7% | 20% |
| 92 (n= 8) | 88% | 75% | 75% |
| Cobb Creek | | | |
| 90-91 (n=18) | 83% | 0% | 39% |
| 92 (n=10) | 100% | 60% | 50% |
| River Park | | | |
| 90-91 (n=15) | 40% | 7% | 7% |
| 92 (n= 6) | 33% | 0% | 0% |
| Total | | | |
| 90-91 (n=61) | 51% | 7% | 23% |
| 92 (n=28) * | 79% | 50% | 46% |

* Note: Two of the 30 First Steps students were not present for this testing.

Table 7. Instructional pacing data for all students in Classrooms D and E; the levels at which children were reading in their basal reader program in December, and in May.

| Basal Level * | December | | May | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Class D | Class E | Class D | Class E |
| Preprimer 1 | - | 14 | | |
| Preprimer 2 | 13 | 4 | | |
| Preprimer 3 | 6 | 6 | - | 10 |
| Primer | 5 | - | 12 | 10 |
| 1-2 | | | 6 | 4 |
| 2-1 | | | 6 | - |

* Note: Students had to be reading in the second half of a given book to be classified at that level.